

REPORT OF THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

The work of WHO in the Western Pacific Region
1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021



Cover photo: A vendor in Moorea, French Polynesia offers a traditional flower welcome wreath in March 2021.

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ISBN 978 92 9061 961 1

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Suggested citation Report of the Regional Director: the work of WHO in the Western Pacific Region 1 July 2020 - 30 June 2021. Manila: World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data. 1. Health policy. 2. Regional health planning. I. World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific. (NLM Classification: WA541)

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Cover: Daily life in French Polynesia, March 2021. © WHO/G. Le Bacon

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Message from the Regional Director

I am pleased to present my third report to Member States on the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Western Pacific Region, covering the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

This has been another unprecedented period as, sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a devastating impact around the world.

While our Region had fared comparatively well until recently, as we were finalizing the preparation of this report, several countries in the Region were experiencing surges in cases – in part driven by the Delta variant – and our share of global cases and deaths was rising sharply. As we continue our work supporting countries to respond to these challenging circumstances, we are always mindful that behind each number is a person and a story – someone’s daughter, son, mother, father, partner, brother, sister, colleague, friend. I express my sincere condolences to all those who have lost someone.

The surge in cases we have seen this year in several countries is a stark reminder, if one was needed, that the pandemic is far from over and that we have a collective imperative to remain vigilant. But even with our best efforts, it now seems very unlikely that globally the virus will disappear. Accordingly, it is crucial that we remain focused

on using all the tools we have at our disposal – public health and social measures, personal protective behaviours and vaccines – in combination to reduce transmission as much as possible, protect health services and health-care workers and, as far as possible, avoid the emergence of new, more dangerous variants.

Furthermore, since the second half of 2020, we have also been working hard to support countries to access safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, and to roll these out, especially to priority populations including health-care workers, older people and those with health conditions that predispose them to getting very sick from COVID-19.

At the same time, as important as COVID-19 is, it is far from the only health challenge our Region faces. While the pandemic continues, people are still at risk of – and dying from – noncommunicable diseases. The climate is still changing, posing serious health risks to people in many parts of our Region. Antimicrobial resistance remains a major threat. And too many people – especially in disadvantaged and vulnerable groups – continue to be afflicted by infectious diseases that we know how to prevent and control. All of these challenges pose huge risks to our health in the future, if we don’t take action to change the future today – which is why Member States asked us to prioritize addressing these challenges when they endorsed

the *For the Future* vision two years ago. Our work in these areas continues, albeit, as this report explains, with some plans changed by the ongoing pandemic and response.

While many things in the world have changed dramatically in the past two years, some things have not, including our Region's strong, unifying belief in the importance of health for a sustainable future – an idea that is at the heart of *For the Future*, and which I believe makes our shared vision more relevant now than ever before. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has never been clearer that health, the economy and the broader well-being of societies are inextricably linked. There is now a greater appreciation of the intrinsic relationship between – and the interconnectedness and interdependence of – health and all other aspects of social and economic development. COVID-19 has made us all rethink our roles in looking after not only our own health, but also the impact of our actions on the health and well-being of others.

As we approach the third year of COVID-19, I believe we have a responsibility to continue to think carefully about what we have learnt during the pandemic – and use these lessons to ensure that we emerge stronger and build a new future based on healthier, safer and more sustainable societies. This will continue to be my driving focus.

In concluding this message, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the millions of health professionals and other essential workers around our Region and the world who continue to work so hard during the pandemic to look after the sick, and to keep the rest of us safe. I also sincerely thank all WHO staff in the Region, as well as our ministry of health colleagues in countries, who, with care and compassion, have been working so hard on the response. We owe you all our deepest gratitude.

I thank Member States for your continued trust in me to lead WHO's work in the Western Pacific Region as – despite our current challenging circumstances – we keep working towards making the Western Pacific the healthiest and safest region in the world.



Takeshi Kasai, MD, Ph. D.
Regional Director
October 2021

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